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COMMENT ON THE NORTH KOREAN PURGE

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The identities of the twelve North Korean leaders convicted for treason on 7 August indicate that the North Korean purges are aimed primarily at the South Korean Labor Party, which comprises an important part of the domestic faction of North Korean Communist leadership. These officials have in the past been chiefly responsible for guerilla activities against the South Korean government.

The convictions may represent shaking-up of the agencies responsible for penetrating South Korea in view of their previous lack of success, and may presage increased political warfare and guerilla activities against South Korea.

Curiously, the convictions weaken the North Korean position since the leaders affected are those on whom North Korea would have to depend primarily for communizing South Korea, and hence could have important consequences for future Communist unification plans. This might mean that the North Koreans have abandoned the hope that they can secure control over the entire peninsula in the foreseeable future, by elections or otherwise.

It is possible that the domestic faction held nationalist views on unification which were unacceptable to over-all Communist objectives. Nor can the possibility be discounted that the domestic faction, or some of its underground agencies, were being penetrated and that the regime is taking defensive steps to neutralize the penetration.

Information is not available indicating that the convictions represent an extension of the Beria ousters to North Korea or reflect differences between the Soviet-oriented and Chinese-oriented factions of North Korean leaders.

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